

POVERTY AND FAMINE IN THE BUREAUCRATIC DISCOURSES OF COLONIAL STATE IN INDIA, 1870 - 1900

Prashant Kumar

Research Scholar, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the series of famines which occurred during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Colonial India, their specificities and relations vis-à-vis colonial administration and its logic of governance. While dwelling upon the causes of these great famines and the treatment meted out to their occurrence by the colonial administration, the paper shows that how the colonial handling of famines was symptomatic of a new colonial governmental rationality. Governmental rationality which was based upon the strict adherence of principles of Classical Political Economy such as laissez-faire, free market, Malthusian population theory et cetera. New governmental rationality which allowed the modernization in colonial India to proceed hand in hand with immiseration. The paper argues that the occurrences of these famines played an important role by providing colonial power with an occasion to reshape the Indian subcontinent in the light of new categories, ideas and governmental rationality introduced by Victorian Imperialism. The paper also argues that the interpretations of famines as a natural disaster expose colonial biases. It states that the colonial famines were a direct byproduct of the increasing impoverishment of India at the hand of colonial exploitation and the drain of resources from India to Great Britain.

KEYWORDS: Famine, Poverty, Immiseration, Classical Political Economy, Colonial State, Modernity, Mortality, Poor, Governance, Discourses

INTRODUCTION

Almost hundred years after the occurrence of Great Bengal Famine of 1770, In 1868 Sir William Wilson Hunter retrieved the information related to 1770 famine from the archival and other contemporary colonial sources and wrote a book called *The Annals of Rural Bengal*. Hunter wrote that “the mortality, the beggary exceeded all description. Above one-third of the inhabitants have perished in the once plentiful province of Purneah, and in other parts the misery is equal” (Hunter, 1868, p. 24). The newly established colonial authority which had got the Diwani rights after Battle of Plassey could have done something to ease the situation; instead, they tighten the collection of land taxes the year before the great famine occurred even after sensing the upcoming catastrophe. Despite 1769 and 1770 being the years of drought, the colonial authority kept collecting revenues from the peasants, thus making the situation of famine more worse. Hunter’s book describes how the great Bengal famine of 1770 was largely a byproduct of the working of colonial power and its attitude towards famine. Hunter drew bleak imagery of 1770 famine by looking at contemporary colonial records and memoirs of the people belonging to that time. While describing the nature of the calamity took place in 1770 Hunter further wrote, “all through the stifling summer of 1770 the people went on dying. The husbandmen sold their cattle; they

sold their implements of agriculture; they devoured their seed-grain; they sold their sons and daughters, till at length no buyer of children could be found; they eat the leaves of trees and the grass of the field; and in June 1770 the Resident at the Durbar affirmed that the living were feeding on the dead." (Ibid., p. 26) This was the beginning of the British Empire in India. Towards the end of the British Empire, India witnessed another great famine in 1943. And the place where both the famines took place was the land of Bengal. At both, the occasion proper treatment of the calamity would have saved the life of millions of people, but colonial administration chose not to do so. Though famine occurred throughout the British regime in India, starting from the very beginning when the Great Bengal Famine of 1770 took the life of almost 10 million people as per the best available estimates, till the last great famine of Bengal in 1943 which costed the life of almost 5 million people (Sen, 1981, p. 39), but the concern of the present paper is to study the series of great famines which took place throughout the last quarter of nineteenth century vis-à-vis the change in the nature of the colonial administration and the logic of its governance (or governmental rationality) during this time. The great drought of 1860 was one of the most devastating famines and the beginning of a series of famines, indeed great famines, which occurred during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The great famine of 1860 in India was followed by three consecutive great famines with a very short period. Each of the last three decades witnessed a great famine. The end of the 1870s and 80s and the beginning of 1990s witnessed drought again. It brought the third wave of great famines across the tropical region of the world including India. Then during the period between 1896 and 1902, the monsoon again failed in Western and central India. The advent of the twentieth century in India was accompanied by a terrible scourge called great famine of 1899-1900. These recurrent droughts and consequent famines were accompanied by devastating epidemics like malaria, cholera and bubonic plague which cost millions of life. However, the present paper will study primarily the great famine of 1876. The paper argues that a detailed study of the bureaucratic discourses around the great famine of 1876 would reveal a certain shift in the colonial paradigm of governance. The treatment meted out to the problem of famines by colonial authorities in their action and discourses is instructive of new governmental rationality and this shift in the logic of colonial governance explains the colonial state's attitude towards all the famines took place during colonial rule in India after 1876.

The Drain of Resources and Recurrent Famines: A Coexistent (Colonial) Phenomenon

The famines of the last quarter of nineteenth century have been chosen owing to the reason that the period after 1858 is characterized by the change in the nature of colonial governance due to the Crown directly taking over the administration of India from East India Company. This change signifies a shift in governmental rationality which determined the course of administration as now the (colonial) state in a proper sense takes over the charge of administration from a mercantile corporation. Rather than the Company governing on behalf of the Crown, the Crown herself took charge of governance. This point will be discussed in detail in the later part of the present paper. The famines of the last quarter of nineteenth have also been chosen, for colonial exploitation and extraction of resources had become more systematized by this time. As a result, a series of devastating famines occurred. Aditya Mukherjee argues that colonial Indian made modern Britain. Mukherjee writes that, "at the heart of colonial is may surplus appropriation from the colony to the metropolis or the colonizers. It was neither a "fit of absentmindedness" nor the desire to take on "the White Man's Burden" to "civilize" and "modernize" the "child" people of the colonial countries which led to or sustained colonialism." (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 74) The colonial economic mechanism was such that the Indian exports remained unrequited as they were paid back by Indian rupees only. This unrequited exports along with Home charges (as explained

by Dadabhai Naoroji) constituted the drain from (colonial) India to Great Britain. The drain assumed a significant size and volume after East India Company taking over the collection of revenues in the wake of the defeat of Indian Ruler at Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the extraction of resources and drain became more systematized after 1857 when the Crown herself took over the charge of administration. This drain of resources in the form of Home charges and through other means along with the flow of unrequited exports continued till 1947. (*Ibid.*, p. 76) During this period colonial power also destroyed Indian home industry in order to felicitate the creation of a market for Lancashire products. In other words, the so-called (British) Industrial revolution was financed by Britain's exploitation of its colony and at the cost of the complete destruction of the Indian industry. Mukherjee points out that the "British net foreign investments as a percentage of her net domestic capital formation in fixed assets was as high as 86 between 1880 and 1889 and had peaked at 114 between 1905 and 1914. India's tribute alone was estimated to have financed more than two-fifths or 40% of Britain's balance of payment deficit in this period." (*Ibid.*, p. 77) Mukherjee further states that, "it has been calculated that between 1871 and 1916 the surpluses transferred from India, calculated after applying a compound rate of interest of 4%, amounted to a conservative estimate of about £3.2 billion. If one compares this figure with an estimate of about £4 billion as what constituted total British foreign investments abroad in 1913 (including reinvestment of interests and dividends) it becomes clear what a preponderant role India played in British capital transfers abroad which made it the "economic hub of the world between 1870 and 1913"."
(*Ibid.*) I am quoting here the data of unrequited transfer of resources from India to England because it was precise during this period three great famines occurred. If one wishes to understand the real causes of occurrence of famines one will have to delve deeper and see how the transformation from India having a share of 19.7 per cent of total world manufacturing output of raw cotton textiles and being one of the largest producers of raw cotton textiles in the world till end of the eighteenth century; to India becoming insignificant in the field of raw cotton textile production under the colonial regime. By 1860, India's share of raw cotton textiles in the total world manufacturing output fell to 8.6 percent. And it reached the dismal level of merely 1.4 per cent by 1913. (*Ibid.*, p. 78) A country which was once the most prosperous in the world had been pushed to the constant threat of being on the verge of hunger, starvation, and famine owing to its progressive deindustrialization in the wake of colonial rule. In the backdrop of the recurrent famines, Dadabhai Naoroji initiated the debate upon the poverty of India (which was later known as Drain theory) towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Naoroji argued that annual drain of resources from India to Great Britain is the chief cause behind the Poverty of India. The colonial extraction of surplus and drain of resources from India to Great Britain was not as systematized till the revolt of 1857 as it became after the revolt being crushed and Crown herself taking over the colonial reign. The annual drain from India to Great Britain was estimated to be 30 million pounds after the revolt, whereas earlier it was merely three million pounds. Between 1860 and 1880, there were seven famines and scarcities in the country which took the life of millions of people. Naoroji attributed these famines as well as the poverty of Indian people to the British system of government in India and the colonial practice of drain of wealth from India that Great Britain had engaged in since the very beginning of colonial regime in India. Naoroji argued that "while in the first place, one part of the colonial economic system extracted resources from Indian economy (B N Ganguli called this kind of drain "Internal Drain" as large part of it was collected in the form of land revenue and other taxes from rural peasantry), subsequently another part of the system transmitted those resources to Britain. The result was a substantial one-way flow of wealth from India to Britain with former receiving nothing in return. This can be observed in the excess of exports over imports of India, and Naoroji calculated that in this manner Britain had over the 38 years period 1835-1872 "kept back its benefit" a sum well above 500,000,000 pounds sterling chiefly owing to the paramount colonial regime in India. (Naoroji, 1887, pp. 191-193) The

composition of the Drain, Naoroji said, consisted of the following:

- Remittance by European officials (a) of their savings, and (b) for their expenditure in England from their salaries and pensions.
- Indian government's expenditure in Britain including the purchase of government stores and salaries and pensions paid in there. (This was also known as Home charges.)
- Remittances by non-official Europeans like planters and businessmen.
- Interest payments in England for English capital invested in India like Railways.

India was one of the most prosperous countries in the world during Mughal Reign. As a result of the constant drain of resources, it became one of the poorest countries in the world during the mid-nineteenth century. On 28th Feb 1876, Dadabhai Naoroji presented a paper titled "Poverty of India", before the Bombay Branch of the East Indian Association, where he presented the first statistical estimate of average per capita income using the official data available. For the year 1867-68, he estimated the total national income of British India as 3.4 billion rupees for the production of 170 million people. In other words, 20 rupees (or 40 shillings) per head was the Per Capita Income of Indian, whereas it was Rs. 420 in Britain and Rs. 375 in the USA. Dadabhai argued that even a laborer considering his most basic necessities of life needed 34 rupees. The expenses over a jail inmate were more than 20 rupees which were the average per capita income of Indian during that time. (Naoroji, 1887, p. 167.)

Famine, Poverty, and Starvation: A Quest for Definition

Sugata Bose argues that "in the history of economic ideas in India the specter of famine looms large in conceptions of poverty." (Bose, p. 440 in Basu et al., 2009) The two terms came to be paired in the title of Amartya Sen's 1981 classic, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*. Sen was careful in delineating the connection between the two while spelling out what distinguished poverty from starvation as well as starvation from famines. Bose further argues that "Sen's entitlement approach is pertinent both to the analysis of famines in history and a reevaluation of the history of economic ideas that have developed at the intersection of poverty and famines." (Ibid) BM Bhatia states that "any definition of famine in the modern context will tell that 'famine no longer meant extreme hunger faced by the population of a region as a result of failure of the accustomed food supply caused generally by the climatic factors', but the lack of purchasing power with those who are suffering from starvation despite being an adequate supply of food. (Bhatia, 1991, pp. 8-9) Amartya Sen defined famine as a crisis of "exchange entitlements" (defined as "legal, economically operative rights of access to resources that give control of food") that may or may not have anything to do with crop yields. Sen argues that "starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat." (Sen, 1984, p. 1) Sen further argues that "food supply statements say things about a commodity (or a group of commodities) considered on its own. Starvation statements are about the relationship of persons to the commodity (or that commodity group)"(Ibid)."Famine," emphasizes Sen, "is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there not being enough food to eat." (Ibid., pp. 1-3) Famine is thus a catastrophic social relation between unequally endowed groups that may be activated by war, depression or even something called "Development" as well as by extreme climate events. Most likely, of course, it is a conjuncture of different factors. Mike Davis points out David Arnold's criticisms of Sen's theoretical model for

ignoring mass extra-legal actions - riots, protests, rebellions - that constitute populist appropriations of entitlement. Michael Watts, an eminent historian who has studies African famines, discounts any "generic theory" of such an "enormously complex social and biological phenomena," sees the exchange-entitlement model as merely a logical first step in building a full historical account of the famine in different social formations.

Famine and Colonialism: Tracing the Genealogy of an Inextricable Knot in Colonial State's Discourses in India

Famine and colonialism were deeply linked to each other in the Indian context. In fact, it won't be an exaggeration to say that the famines were a colonial phenomenon. We don't mean to imply here that famines never occurred during pre-colonial India. Of course, famines occurred before but its occurrences were never so frequent and nor they were a product of systematic extraction of surpluses and drain of resources from India to a foreign land. Towards the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the early nationalist thinkers and leaders had started pointing out the systematic transfer of resources from India to Great Britain and consequent poverty as the chief reason behind recurrent famines beginning in the 1860s. The nationalists were largely anti-Imperialist in their outlook so they were able to see the kind of colonial exploitation of India was taking place. But these nationalists were not alone, there were a few contemporary Europeans also who were able to see the magnitude and devastating effects of famines upon India. William Digby was one of them. He had extensively covered the 1876 Madras famine. He wrote that "the part played by the British Empire in the nineteenth century is regarded by the historian fifty years hence, the unnecessary deaths of millions of Indians would be its principal and most notorious monument." (Digby, 1901, p.118) Another European Alfred Russel Wallace, a renowned naturalist and an associate of Charles Darwin, argued that famines were not natural disaster (as often portrayed by colonial authorities) but avertible catastrophe which could have been avoided if it was willed so by the colonial authority. In 1898, a balance-sheet of the Victorian era was published where Wallace characterized the "famines in India and China, together with the slum poverty of the industrial cities, as "the most terrible failures of the century." (Digby, 1901, p. 118) But Digby and Wallace are exceptional among Europeans in terms of being vocal and expressive of horrors of colonial famines. The apologists of Empire did everything possible in order to hide the naked truths of colonial excesses. Mike Davis argues that devastating famines of the 1860s, 70s, and 90s which affected the colonies of Great Britain at large seem to have disappeared from the world history curriculum, whereas Dickensian slums remained a part of it. The Victorian calamities which took millions of life are being ignored by historians of 19th century world history as they write from the perspective of the metropolis. (Davis, 2001, p. 8) When acclaimed Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote a trilogy upon long nineteenth century, he chose to ignore the disastrous famines of India and China which occurred during this long nineteenth century only. Though he mentioned the Great drought of Ireland as well as the Russian Famine of the early 1890s, he made no reference to Asian tragedy. It is the tragedy of colonized Asia which Hobsbawm chose to ignore. While discussing the biases of British authors regarding famines, W WHunter wrote in his book *The Annals of Rural Bengal* that James Mill could spare only five lines for the discussion over famines in his so-called magnanimous history of India. Many other such instances can be cited here of contemporary historians' neglect of such disastrous event.

What is at stake here is not the deaths of millions of rural India people but the manner in which they were left to die and the logic and rationality (of governance) which did not allow colonial authorities to do anything except being dogmatically adherent to the principles of classical political economy (like Malthusian population theory which expected such natural calamities in order to balance the ratio between the growth in population and means of subsistence). It ought to be kept in mind here that this was the very time when famines started occurring in Britain's colonies of Asia and it

permanently disappeared from Western Europe. In other words, this link explains to us that we are dealing not with “lands of famine” becalmed in stagnant backwaters of world history, but with the fate of tropical humanity at the precise moment (1870-1914) when its labor and products were being dynamically conscripted into a London-centered world economy. India along with other colonies was integrated into the newly emerging West-centered world economy as a producer of raw materials. India’s industry was systematically destroyed by British colonial power and turned into a consumer of British goods and supplier of raw materials to Great Britain. Mike Davis has aptly pointed out in his book *Victorian Holocaust* that the death of millions of people in Asian and African colonies of British empire didn’t take place in isolation from the modern world economic system but these deaths happened in the very process of forcible integration into a world economic system that was designed to serve the imperial interest. And this imperial economic system had an alibi whose name was Classical Political Economy. During the nineteenth century, the proponents of Classical Political Economy proposed an international trade theory which was based upon the principle of comparative advantage. Whereas, the principle of comparative advantage was responsible for restructuring of international trade in favor of West; the Malthusian population theory along with other principles of the free market and Classical Political Economy, in general, was responsible for the occurrence of famines and the consequent casualties during famines. In other words, we can say that famines were a colonial phenomenon. Victorian famines in India were an integral part of the process of introducing capitalist modernity in India by the colonial state. The modernity brought in India is mediated through colonialism. Karl Polanyi understood the nature of nineteenth-century Victorian famine of India. “The actual source of famines in the last fifty years,” he wrote in his book *The Great Transformation*, “was the free marketing of grain combined with the local failure of incomes”. (Polanyi, 1944, p. 160) The pre-colonial native institutions and their principles were destroyed and replaced with the new (colonial) institutions and values of the market economy which served imperial interests. By capitalizing labor and land along with commodifying agriculture, the traditional social, cultural and moral fabric of the native society was destroyed. (Polanyi, 1944, p. 159-60) The traditional system of mutual interdependence and support were replaced with the new logic of free market. In a way, the organicity of traditional society was disturbed by the colonial re-configuration of Indian society and economy. One major reason behind these devastating famines was the colonial enclosure of the common land available for common use, as the enclosure of common land happened in Great Britain during the eighteenth century. The system of common lands and the shared store of free goods like agricultural and forest produce was the inalienable part of a village economy in pre-colonial India. The use of common lands and forests easily provided with grass and fodders for cattle and wood, leaves and other stuff for human consumption. Though the common resources were utilized by everyone it acted as a support system particularly for the poor in the time of crises. The colonial power consolidated their rule in India by transferring the control of common resources from the village community to the state. The reorganization of the world economic order in the wake of the Industrial Revolution was paved with the untold suffering, incomprehensible misery and millions of death of poor natives of colonial Asia and Africa. Davis argues that ‘Indian masses in the second half of the nineteenth century did not die of hunger but because they were exploited by Lancashire; they perished in large numbers because the Indian village community had been demolished.’ (Davis, 2001, p.10) As it has been pointed out above, the process of integration of colonial Indian economy with London-centric global economic order required that a certain kind of market is constructed in India. This process of creating a subservient colonial economy as a producer of raw material for the metropolis, in fact, have inextricable political histories. Davis has rightly highlighted that ‘the famines which Karl Polanyi described as rooted in commodity cycles and trade circuits were constituted as an inalienable part of the perennial violence inflicted upon the colonized in the course of

restructuring colonized economy.' The death of millions of Indian was at the end a policy choice at the hand of colonial authority. (*Ibid.*, pp. 10-11)

The monsoon failed in 1876 and it caused a severe drought in the tropical region across Asia. It was also the time when world trade was going through severe depression owing to Germany's abandonment of silver standard. This phase of depression was later known as the Long Depression. The Great Famine of 1876-78 affected the entire Deccan region encompassing parts of south and southwestern India. The famine affected almost 58 million people and took the life of almost 6 million people. The increasing recession at the world market also affected the drought-ridden Deccan region which had become largely the cotton-producing region. Before cotton replacing as the main crop, gram used to be the main crop. Cotton is a cash crop disturbed the food security cycle of the inhabitants. Forest enclosures in Deccan also reduced the people's dependence of forest produce in times of crises. The traditional system of household and village grain reserves were regulated by complex networks of ancestral and traditional obligations and responsibilities had been largely supplanted since the Mutiny by merchant inventories and the cash nexus. Although rice and wheat production in the rest of India had been above average for the past three years, much of the surplus had been exported to England. In effect, Britishers were eating India's bread.

A nineteenth-century English writer Cornelius Walford, troubled by the plight of Indian people and Indian situation owing to great famine of 1876, wrote that, "It seems an anomaly that, with her famines on hand, India is able to supply food for other parts of the world; but it has to be remembered that the natives there subsist very much on rice, and on inferior cereals designated as "dry crops," of which we know nothing in this country; and then there is the internal transport difficulty." (Walford, 1879, p. 126) Mike Davis points out, "there were other "anomalies" too." (Davis, 2001, p.26) He draws our attention towards the proliferation of Railway networks and its relation to famines. Railways were supposed to be an institutional safeguard against famine, but it actually functioned contrary to this supposed function. Merchants used railways to transport grains from one place to another and helped the traders to hoard the grains at other places. So the drought-ridden regions were soon turned into famine-stricken regions. Since people used to travel through Railways, the news of price hike was transmitted soon from one place to another. What made the situation further worse was the antipathy of the colonial authority towards price control (as the curbing of prices was considered as an impediment to the spirit of the free market. (*Ibid.*) These were the inherent contradiction of the capitalist modernity introduced by a colonial power in India. While talking about these contradictions, it must be kept in mind that the main source of revenues for the colonial state in India was the collection of land taxes and unrequited exports. The peasants were already crushed under the varied taxes which was imposed upon them in order to build public amenities or infrastructure like railways which only increased their woes by acting as a facilitator for ever-increasing prices of grains and transporter of raw materials. The depreciation of rupees during this period also worsened the effects of famines. Whereas western countries had adopted Gold Standard as the new measure of international exchange, but India was still on Silver Standard which steeply raised the cost of imports.

During the time of 1876-78 famine, Lord Lytton was the viceroy of India. He adopted a laissez-faire approach to famine. Lytton was a true adherer of the principles of Classical Political Economy. Adam Smith had argued almost a century earlier vis-à-vis the Great Bengal Famine of 1770 that "famine has never arisen from any cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconveniences of dearth." (Davis, 2001, p. 31) Adam Smith's admonitions regarding the government's efforts to control the prices of grain during the famine were part of regular

teaching of civil servants at Haileybury. Keeping with the teachings, Lytton issued stricture that “there is to be no interference of any kind on the part of Government with the object of reducing the price of food,” and “in his letters home to the India Office at London and to politicians of both parties, he denounced ‘humanitarian hysterics.’”(Ibid.) Meanwhile, the export of wheat was continued. Rather than relieving starvation in India, a record 6.4 million Cwt of wheat was exported from India to Europe in 1877-78. One another proponent of Classical Political economy whose name was Thomas Malthus also held great sway over the minds of colonial bureaucrats. While justifying his strictures and stringencies to the Legislative Council, Lytton reinforced Malthusian Population Theory and argued that the Indian population “has a tendency to increase more rapidly than the food it raises from the soil.” (Ibid., p. 32) The relief to famine-stricken people was also discouraged as there was a perverse belief that relief would set off a vicious cycle of dependence which would further generate penury. The Famine Commission Report of 1878-80 approvingly underscored Lord Lytton's lame reasoning “that in time of famine the poor are entitled to demand relief would probably lead to the doctrine that they are entitled to such relief at all times, and thus the foundation would be laid of a system of general poor relief, which we cannot contemplate without serious apprehension....” (Ibid, p. 33) Lytton further curbed the famine relief programs. Famine Commission of 1880 under the chairmanship of utilitarian Sir Richard Strachey framed the infamous Famine Codes in order to govern the famine relief programs. Under the terms and conditions of this Famine Code, “the fact of the relief seeker submitting to the test of giving a reasonable amount of work in return for a subsistence wage was considered to be sufficient proof of his necessity.” (Bhattacharya (in Hajelaedt.), 2001, p. 95) The Famine Code introduced by the Famine Commission of 1880 was further developed by the Famine Commission of 1898 and 1901. The introduction of distance test, labor test, and residence test meant that “any person starving in famine-affected areas would have to perform a certain amount of labor in the public works and/or travel a certain distance (upto15 miles), or accept compulsory residence in a special area away from the home village.” (Ibid.) These tests were expected to deter those who did not really need the wages in government works programs for the famine affected. The idea of these tests were first put forward in 1877 by Lord Lytton during the great famine of 1876-78: “The obligation to do a full day’s work at a low rate of wage, and to go some distance to work, keeps from seeking relief those who can support themselves otherwise” (Famine Commission Report, 1898, p. 239). Sabyasachi Bhattacharya explains that “the idea was to distinguish the poor from the really destitute, in the same manner as the English Poor Law of 1834 distinguished “the indigent” entitled to relief from the ranks of the poor.” (Bhattacharya, 2001, P. 95) The Secretary of State endorsed these principles of discouraging “relief of applicants not in want” and the requirement of a distance test which can “without undue hardship be used as a test of destitution” (Famine Commission, 1898, p.84). Sir Richard Temple, a special envoy of Lytton deputed to oversee the famine relief programs during the Great famines of Deccan, made the starving applicants walk to dormitory camps outside their home village to be employed upon public works in order to get the subsistence wage. Owing to the distance test, able-bodied were refused to work within 10 miles radius of their home. Famished laborers were also prohibited from seeking relief until “it was certified that they had become indigent, destitute and capable of only a modicum of labor” (Davis, 2001. p. 38). The framing of the Famine Code was symptomatic of the newly emerging colonial paradigm of governance. It is in the framing of the Famine Code that the inextricable knot of poverty and famine be located in colonial state’s discourses.

Monsoon again failed in 1896 owing to some disturbances in the usual pattern of El Nino effect. And mostly the same story was repeated this time also. High prices rapidly turned drought into famine. The same kind of callousness on part of the colonial administration, and the very obsession with the ‘market principle’, ‘Benthamite dogma’and ‘Malthusian Measures’ were exhibited. In a land where famished laborers were easily replaced, “The Secretary of State in

London was telling the Viceroy that he was ‘more concerned about plague than famine’ because a ‘market once lost, or even partially deserted, is not easily regained.’” (Davis, 2001, p. 152) This statement itself clears the underlying logic of colonial governance (or governmental rationality) and attitude towards the occurrence of great famines and the consequent loss of the life of colonized.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been shown that how modernization and commercialization introduced by colonial regime in India went hand in hand with immiseration and pauperization. The occurrence of the series of great famines during the last quarter of the nineteenth century bears testimony to this fact. The paper also argues that colonial famines were, not something which happened or occurred on its own, rather it was created in the same way as the market was constructed by colonial authorities through the strict adherence of the principles of Classical Political Economy. The paper shows that the labeling of starvation and famine as natural disaster was actually a colonial construct. Celebrated cash-crop booms accompanied by declining agrarian productivity and food security were not merely a coincidence. Colonial famines were the aftereffects of the colonial drain of resources and India being turned into a supplier of raw materials and a market for British manufactured products. The wheat boom in Narmada reason during the 1870s was accompanied by Hunger and consequent famines as most of the produce were exported to England. The overall wager of the paper is to bring to light the so-called apparent facts regarding colonial famines through invoking a certain kind of details so that it would not let these truths easily concealed and digested. Otherwise, we would keep seeing the bout of colonial madness in the very discipline of history and doing history. The paper dwells upon some of the specific aspects of a series of colonial famines happened during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It also argued that a detailed and careful study of the bureaucratic discourses of the great famine of 1876 would reveal a paradigm shift in colonial governance. The treatment meted out to the problem of famines by colonial authorities in their action and discourses is instructive of new governmental rationality and this shift in the logic of colonial governance explains the colonial state’s attitude towards all the famines which took place during colonial rule in India after 1876. Today when a large section of Indian society is suffering from Hunger and Poverty, Government refused to release the grains from the stock but let it get destroyed in the depot because the releasing of grains will disturb the market rationality and affect the price mechanisms based upon the (neo)liberal doctrine of the free market. We should not forget that this is the time when India is passing through a neo-liberal sway of policies. A rigorous engagement with the history of the governance of our colonial past and the contemporary responses from nationalist quarters will surely be able to tell more about our past and its repercussions on the present.

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